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Honig's Owl-Tower

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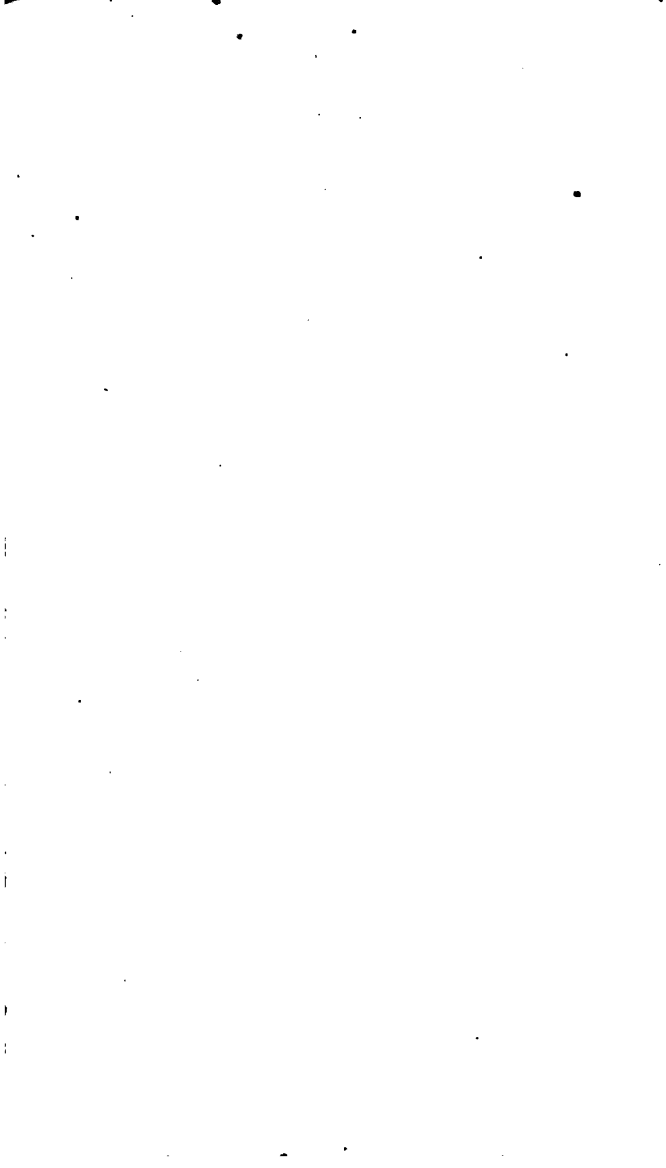


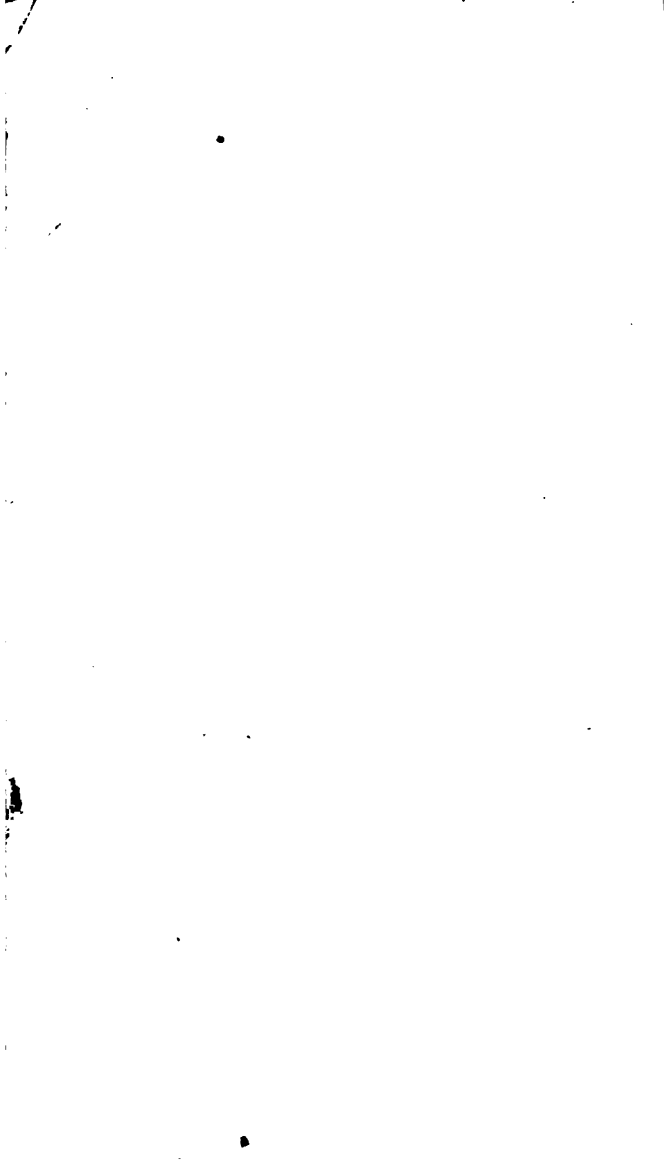


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HONIG'S OWL-TOWER.

A GERMAN TALE.





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A GERMAN TALE.



CAMBRIDGE :

PUBLISHED BY HILLIARD AND BROWN.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

It was found necessary to bind up the 'Offering,' before this tale, which was to have appeared in it, and was already in the press, could be finished. The merit of the story, and the charitable purpose, (the benefit of the Infant School,) for which it was written, induced the Editor to have it printed separately for the same object.



HONIG'S OWL-TOWER.

THERE lived, about ten years ago, in the German free-town Suabian Hall, a man, whose name was Honig and whose manners and life contrasted so strongly with those of his fellow citizens that to have attempted to conform the one to the other, would have been mending an old garment with new cloth. Yet he himself, when he pleased, knew so well how to adapt his own style of life to the worn and chequered texture of the Halleian habits, that they appeared to have been cut from the same old fashioned silk. He was about fifty years of age, strong built, above the middle size ; his gait was free, and erect, the expression of his countenance was mild irony, yet an aquiline nose, a high forehead, whose many wrinkles spoke of subdued passions, showed that he was capable of more than playful thoughts ; and, in contrast with the half scornful smile of his finely shaped mouth, his large sharp blue eyes were full of friendly earnestness. Every morning with the dawn of the day, every noon at one o'clock, you might see him striding with

his scale in his hand, through the old Gelbinger gate to the salt works, where he had a small office as workmaster of the carpenters. His attire was mean and coarse, his head often without a cover save his curly, black, and partly grey hair. He went along, usually whistling an old march, and followed by a large black dog, whose name was Russ.

Among the gossiping inhabitants of Hall were told many strange tales about his former life. He was said to be of high extraction, to have studied, and as an officer, to have spent a great deal of his life in war. For his living now so retired in a low hut in the suburbs of Gelbingen they could not account but by believing it a whim ; for that he was rich, nobody doubted, who knew his charity and his carelessness about all pecuniary affairs. By many he was suspected of practising the magic art, and many inquiries and hints were given to him concerning this suspicion, which he usually answered with an ambiguous smile. An old tower at the city wall, which he had purchased and furnished, called the Owl-Tower, was regarded as his laboratory. In this tower he spent the greatest part of his leisure time ; from a chamber in the highest story his lamp was often discerned in the night, and from a furnace on the ground, near the entrance, built after the last great conflagration of the city by a shelterless potter's family, the smoke was seen crossing the evening sky. Often strange voices were heard round

the tower, as if of growling dogs or ominous owlets, at which some sleepless neighbour shook his head, and whispered of it the next day.

Yet were his manners not unsocial; one hour every evening he regularly spent in the ale-house of the suburbs among his smoking and attentive neighbours, telling curious stories and giving good advice, and when he walked on Sunday afternoons to his little wood-lot in Hessenthal, every peasant who came in his way enjoyed his greetings and a friendly conversation.

It was on such an afternoon, when he passed the foot path round the old walls of the city; the sun was hastening to his western couch in all the silent beauty of a Sabbath evening, when he observed, under a hazel bush on the outside of Doctor Haspel's orchard a young weeping boy. As the watchful Russ barked at him he looked up and showed a pale fine face; pale it was, notwithstanding the red hectic spot on the cheek, and the enlivening beam of the evening sun, which was reflected back from his glistening eyes. Honig knew him. It was the poor French apprentice of his neighbour, the book-binder. He went to him and gently raising his head, which was sinking again in tears, he let his hand rest on his forehead and said,—
“Baptiste, how many weeping eyes like yours do you think the setting sun beholds at this moment? and how many of them will he see comforted when he

rises to-morrow? Will not yours be among the number? Tell me your grief, you are not so much of a stranger here as not to have one friend in this place, besides God, who is every where." He kissed the forehead of the grief-worn boy; he took his hand and drew him softly from his stone seat. "Come, let us go home together, and let this Sabbath be the birthday of our friendship and confidence. It may have been long since you sat at table with one who loved you. Be Honig's guest this evening, and let me send word to your master, to excuse your not returning home." The boy stood motionless, fixed his dimmed eye upon the ground; then he began to tremble, his eyes rose to Honig's, and at once he threw himself convulsively on his breast, and sobbed bitterly.

Three years had passed and he had not met a friendly being, had not heard a word of love. The last were those of his dying mother. Certainly her spirit was present now, when the forsaken child had found his friend. The storm in Baptiste's bosom was allayed by a flood of tears; his hand clasped in Honig's, he went through the old city gate of Gelbingen along the walls, till they reached Honig's garden in the Blend-Stadt. A fire was kindled on the hearth of the Owl-Tower, and bread, milk, fruit, and some other frugal provisions were soon collected for their supper. They partook of it in silence and even cheerfulness. The eyes of Baptiste brightened and his bo-

som heaved, like the foliage after a heavy shower, trembling under the glistening drops. Then, when the twilight had vanished, they ascended to the top of the tower. Night looked in at the window, broad and dark, with a hundred half opened eyes. Choirs of nightingales soothed the landscape below to slumber, and many a distant bell was echoed by another and by the melancholy music of the human heart. There the sorrows of poor Baptiste were softened into love and confidence.

The essential part of Baptiste's and his mother's unfortunate story was this. The father, a fugitive Irish nobleman, was married to a French lady of high birth and fortune, against the will of her parents. She fled with him from her beloved France, to the Pays de Vaux, where they lived concealed, and where Baptiste was born. The father, to meliorate their precarious circumstances, entered as an officer into the Austrian army, from whence he sent supplies to his wife and child, whom he never saw again. He fell in the battle of Aspern. Baptiste came in the year 1810, to Hall, in Suabia, with his mother, on a journey, which she undertook to find shelter with a sister, who was married in Brussels. It was on a chilly harvest evening, when they had left the little old town Neuenstein, with its grey broken walls and castle ; the road

had to walk for more than an hour, and often to climb back to their lost way, before they saw at last the lights of the village. They were too weary even to rejoice, the Jew only uttered an expression of thanks. In the tavern, which they finally reached, the wedding guests of a neighbouring peasant had occupied all the chambers. The landlord objected even to admit the strangers, whose attire promised him not much profit. The driver recognised his passengers; he was just about to drive, with another coach, the rest of the way to Hall, and took them in. Wrapped in their wet garments they rode on, speechless and shuddering, one long hour more. Finally the old city gate of Hall creaked on its hinges. When the gate-keeper lifted his lantern, to take a peep at the passengers, the first face on which the light fell was a dead one. Baptiste screamed and fell senseless at the feet of his cold mother.

These were the circumstances, which brought Baptiste with his dead mother to Suabian Hall. Honig had known them for some days from Rosina, the same kind female, mentioned as their companion in the coach; but he caused the friendless boy to unbosom himself by relating again his own sad recollection. When he came to the story of his life in Suabian Hall, and recalled the curiosity, and the rude compassion with which he was received in the book-binder's house,

the unfeeling mockery with which his ignorance of the language and his Catholic religion were treated, the envy which arose, when by attentive assiduity and natural skill, the apprentice threatened soon to surpass the journeymen, his teachers, Honig observed what painful agitations it excited in him. But Honig knew more. He had from his windows observed within a few days, with what concealed eagerness, with what a blushing face the lonely boy watched in his few leisure moments every opening window in the house of neighbour Hornung, the father of Rosina, and how, when Rosina herself appeared at the door or looked from the window, Baptiste grew pale and timidly drew back his head. Even if Honig had been less experienced in the rich and painful depths of the human heart, so as not to explain from these indications that Baptiste had cast all the love of his orphan soul on the first, the only human being he had met with in this strange and rough country, who had known his mother, and smiled on her, and who had guided him by the hand through night and rain; he must have learnt it from the warmer language of Baptiste's flute, which sounded in the summer evenings in low complaints from his garret, and many a Sunday morning from the bushes of the hill opposite the Owl Tower, in more ardent and lyrical raptures of pain.

Rosina Hornung was the daughter of an uneducated brewer, who suddenly had become rich, and a

good-natured but silly mother. The ambition of her parents was bent upon accumulating upon their daughter all the accomplishments, in which they themselves were wanting, and which could be had for money. But here, as is so often the case in life, the wrong intention in education, called forth the opposite extreme. The more the rich Hornung and his wife, grew vain-glorious of their money, and the learning of their daughter, the more they despised other people, the humbler grew Rosina, and it seemed as if she always endeavoured, by the friendliest demeanor towards every one to atone for the rude pride of her family. Was the habitual inclination of the girl's fine head, were the downcast eyelids, owing to this humble feeling? Even when she touched her piano, every gentle note seemed to inquire, whether it pleased, or whether it did not offend, as intruding or vain? To this image the heart of Baptiste clung with the whole violence of his national and parental temper; he seemed pining like some noble tropic plant for warmer glances of the sun, when transplanted into northern mists and dreary snow. He loved her, as he had loved his mother; and when he prayed his Ave Maria, the holy Virgin and Rosina's image melted together. He loved nothing else. He could not express, he scarcely knew himself, his love; silent and wasting it ate into his breast.

Honig divined the whole danger and strength of his feelings, he dared not touch upon this vibrating string. But he was obliged, in order to give poor Baptiste more thorough consolation, to mention two other painful circumstances of his melancholy situation.

"Baptiste," he said, and drew the boy to his bosom, "Baptiste," he said, while he kissed his cold forehead, "Baptiste, my child, you have not entrusted me with all your griefs. Have you not entire confidence in an old man, your friend, because you have known him for so short a time, and all others in this country, I would say almost all, have shown themselves so hard and unjust towards you? Then do believe me, because I can assure you with man's truth that I have never doubted your innocence, my slandered friend, and that with your broken flute there was lost to me as much joy as to yourself. Do let me hear it stated and explained by yourself, all my own anticipations about the story of the theft, and the broken flute. Do you know how much lighter is every burden, when borne by two?"

"Miss —— There was a book," —— began Baptiste, stammering,—"there was a hymn book sent over to us, to fasten the silver buckle and set on the velvet cover."

"Did it not belong to Miss Hornung?" inquired Honig.

"Yes," answered Baptiste quick, but scarcely audible, and drew himself up from Honig's breast, who could feel the throbbing of his heart. "Last Sunday I wanted to read and pray from it—this book looked so beautiful and solemn—and I had often thought, how joyfully happy people must pray, and thought, if I could read in this beautiful book, that I should feel joyful and thankful as happy men do. I took the book up into my garret. Though it was a heretic book, there could be no sin to read in it, where Miss Rosina did, who was so kind towards my mother, and she would not be angry, if she were to see me reading. I found a page marked with a blue silk thread," continued Baptiste hastily, "I opened, I saw the hymn :"

Who gives to God his love and cares,
And trusts upon his Father's eye.

"I may have wept, or, bent myself upon the book," said Baptiste blushing, "I heard the journeymen in the adjoining chamber laughing; they can look through the small holes in the wall. But at this moment the master called me down and sent me on some urgent errand to the sexton in the old city. I had no time left to return to my garret, and to replace the book. When I came home,"—he rose from his seat in great agitation.

"The book was gone," said Honig in his stead, and drew him gently down to his seat.

"The book was missing, they accused me of stealing it,—oh, my father and mother in the tomb! I steal! and all believed, all believe it. Miss Rosina left town, and will believe it too. I shall not live to see her ever again, and to be cleared of this suspicion!"

So violent were the expressions of his grief that Honig thought it dangerous, even to contradict its cause immediately by the news, that all was detected and Baptiste's innocence made evident.

"And how was it with your flute?" inquired Honig to divert him.

"My flute, my father's flute, which his friend brought from the field of Aspern, I found it on the ground, broken, when search was made for the book. And the journeymen laughed and said, it would be good for my sickly lungs that the pipe was broken."

"I fear, my friend, there they may have spoken something true. I often thought, when I heard you play, that a breath so full and loose and trembling, so pliable in the highest pitch and intensity of sound, could not proceed from a healthy and firm chest. But, Baptiste, I have glad news for you."

"Alas, they come too late, whatever they be."

"You know, that the instrument-maker from Comburg has been here, and has seen your flute, and has declared, it could be repaired without any disadvantage to the tone and so as scarcely to be seen."

"O my kind friend, I might say father," exclaimed the boy in softer emotion and leaned his head upon Honig's knee, "it is too late; lay it with me in my grave. My breast burns, I hope I shall soon see again my mother, I see her lately in all my dreams. But last night I heard her calling my name, and saw the vineyards in Pays de Vaux amongst whose broad green leaves and swelling grapes I was once lost from her, till I saw after some time her beautiful motherly face above the leaves and heard her calling for me as she called last night. O God, how fair was it all, and how long ago!"

Honig hardly subdued his own emotion. "Baptiste, I have still better news, my beloved friend. What would you say, if Miss Rosina had found her lost book, and it had been discovered that it was stolen by a journeyman of your master's, and that your good name is saved?"

"Is it? Jesu, Maria, and ye holy angels! And she knows it herself? O God be thanked, now I may die without sorrow!"

"Baptiste," said Honig, "there is no need of dying. Do not indulge such fancies. You are sick, to be sure, and very feverish feels your brow at this very moment. But you are young; and peace and joy are powerful medicines. The one you have received already, and also for the first care is taken. Some friends of your's have arranged it with your master,

that your four years' apprenticeship is shortened, and terminates with to-morrow. Mr. Kaiser, a young master in town and a friendly man, who has been in France and speaks your language, will give you work ; he likes what he saw of your book-binding. As he has no room in his house and lives not far from me, you may find a little neat chamber under my own roof, if you like, and you may eat at a friend's table. To sleep in my house you may begin this very night. But let us go down, it grows late and cooler, and such a fresh starry night is healthy for sick minds, but not for sickly lungs."

But Baptiste rose not—"Honig," replied he with a faint eagerness, "I thank you. It is too late. I have felt it for months ; during the last weeks my feverish nights have grown more painful. Then came the story about the book, and then my flute was broken—I think my heart and life too."

He slid down from the low stool to the ground. Honig, frightened, received him in his arms ; he raised him up. "Baptiste ! what means this ?" He felt the boy's hand wet, he lifted him nearer the window and saw in the starlight, dark blood flowing from his lips.

. "And trusts upon his Father's eye," were his last dying accents.

"O, God in heaven !" exclaimed Honig, "is it indeed too late ? Poor Baptiste !" His last heavy breathings had ceased ; Honig took up his chilled,

stiffened figure. The head and the arms hung over Honig's shoulder, who, with his left arm round his waist, carried him down the steep and narrow steps. The dog followed moaning.

At one of the turns Baptiste's head suddenly fell against Honig's, and it seemed to him as if he had heard a breathing sound, and had even felt a warmer air touch his ear. He almost shuddered from joy and eager surprise; but the dim light through one of the loopholes, showed the boy's features, though indistinct, yet steady,—his body was entirely cold—all was silent.

He carried him down the last flight of stairs. There he placed him in a chair in the corner, till he had again kindled the lamp.

Baptiste's corpse had sunk a little down and leaned on one side. His lovely head had found an unsought rest on the case of an old time-piece; his arms were hanging down, his legs were stretched out. Before him sat the dog, moaning lowly and wagging his tail.

"Away, Russ!" exclaimed Honig, "away, animal soul. Thou hast shown thyself, the whole evening, envious and grumbling. Wilt thou teach me now a lesson, how quick we ought to be in loving and showing kindness, how quick death can open the blood-vessels of a breast, and mock our slow affections?"

“Often I was struck with this boy’s face and recollected the few circumstances I had heard of his fate ; I thought, let the boy forget his noble descent and learn to take care of himself, then will he be more fit and ripe for friendship and confidence. And when Rosina told me his late distress, even then I delayed some days, in order to have all ready and to surprise him at once. Yes, to surprise him ! How will Rosina receive this news ? But perhaps I should have only prolonged his fruitless pains. God alone knows.

“How fine a human frame ! Yes, I mourn thee, child of grief. Besides Rosina’s, these will be the only tears that follow thee. I mourn thy short and joyless life, and the silenced flute-sounds of thy pining bosom. I mourn the future man, that promising spoke from thy thoughtful eye, and was expressed in all thy silent suffering, and in thy poor painful industry with thy stinging breast, and in thy strong and persevering feelings.

“Had some foreigner heard thy self-taught playing on thy flute, he would have spoken of Gyroweter and Pleyel, of whom thou must have heard some sonatas, or one of Mozart’s adagios.

“If thou hadst been discovered to be the lost son of some king, they would praise thy magnanimity in distress. If thou hadst not been a Catholic and a Frenchman and a son of unknown parents, or if they had read of thee in some sentimental novel, they would

admire thy Christian fortitude, and thy noble sorrows, and thy untimely end. Thus, thou diest forgotten.

“How fine this face looks, lately weeping so near my own. Now it leans on the time-piece, which goes on its merciless, regular way. Let me shut these eyes ! How thy mother must have loved thee, when she saw them for the first time opened towards her ; how she must have loved thee, when they vanished from her fainting looks in night and rain ! ”

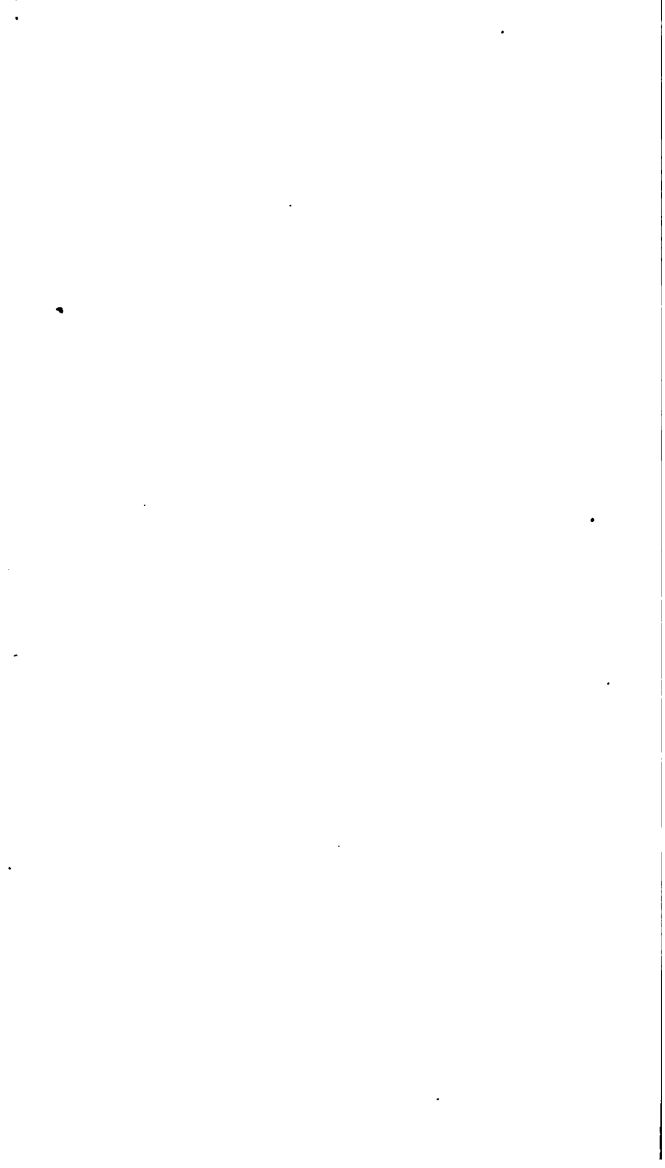
Honig remained with the dead body, pacing to and fro in the small apartment.

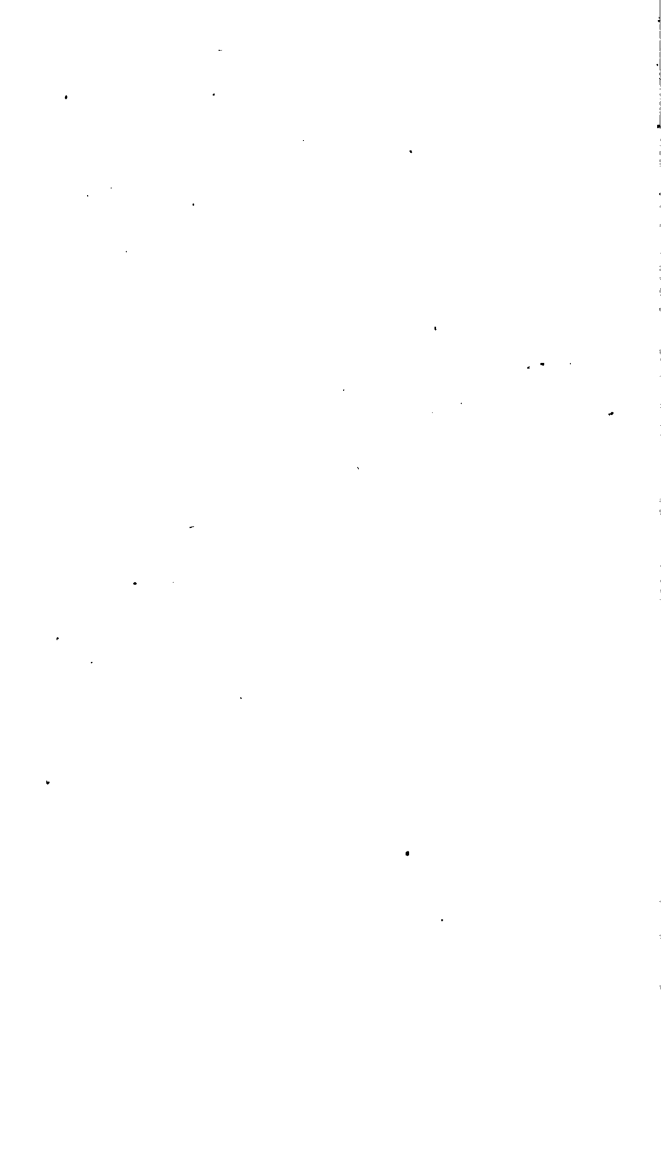
“Midnight is past,” said he at length to himself. “It will offend none of the neighbours, if by chance they hear me work. I will carve a cross for his grave. His axe, saw, and plane, soon sounded through the night, whilst he himself hummed the melancholy notes of an old pilgrim wanderer’s lay.

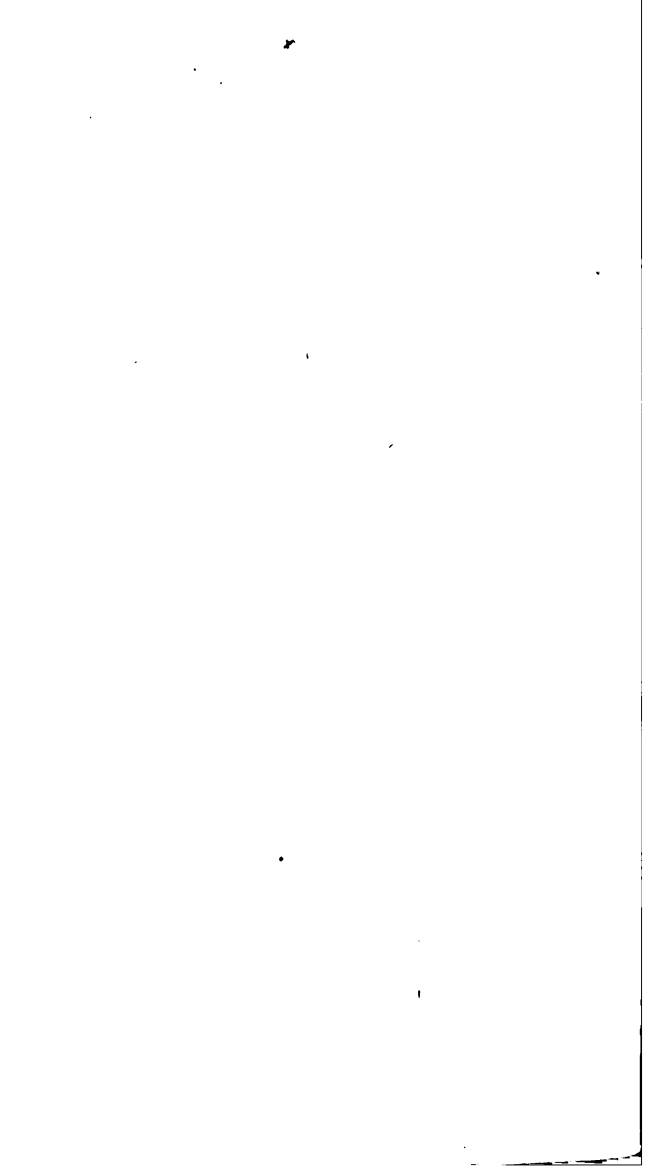
The day had come, the cross leaned ready near the door, waiting only for its destination. Honig knocked at Master Kilian’s window, and informed the astonished bookbinder of the death of his French apprentice. “Will you make the previous official information, and arrange things for his burial to-morrow ? The costs I will bear.”

The bustle of the day went on, as if nothing had happened ; the coopers hammered in the suburbs, the tin-men and the blacksmiths were at their work, the

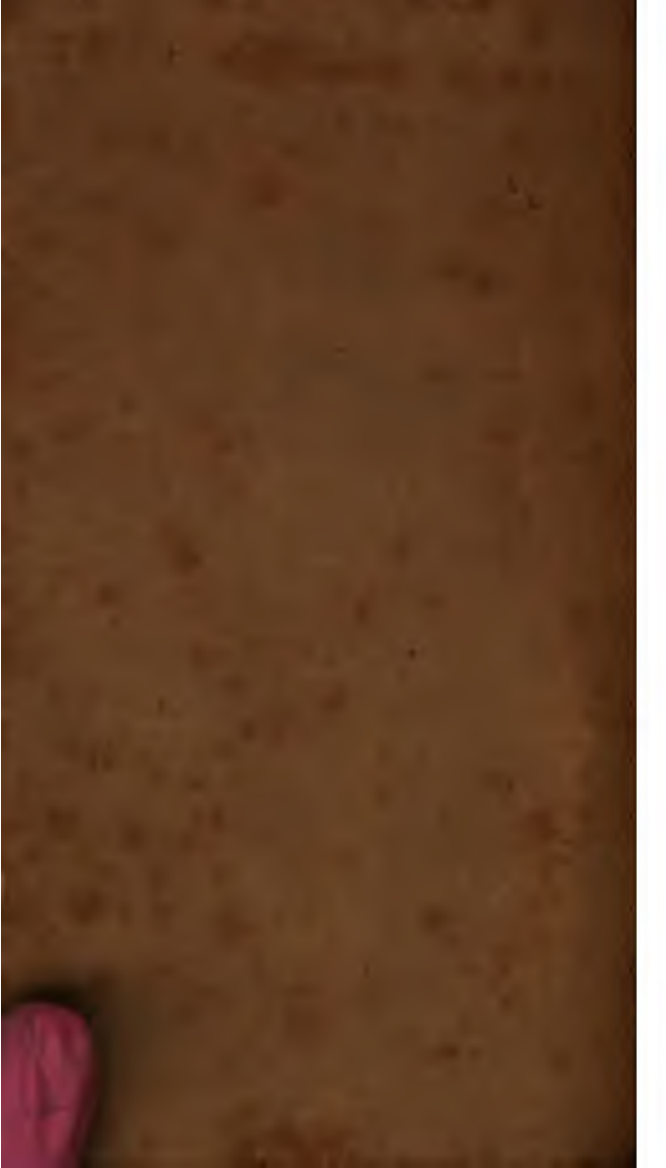
market people passed through the city gate. Honig strode along with his scale, followed by Russ. Only he was observed to-day not to whistle, and to greet every neighbour with double kindness.



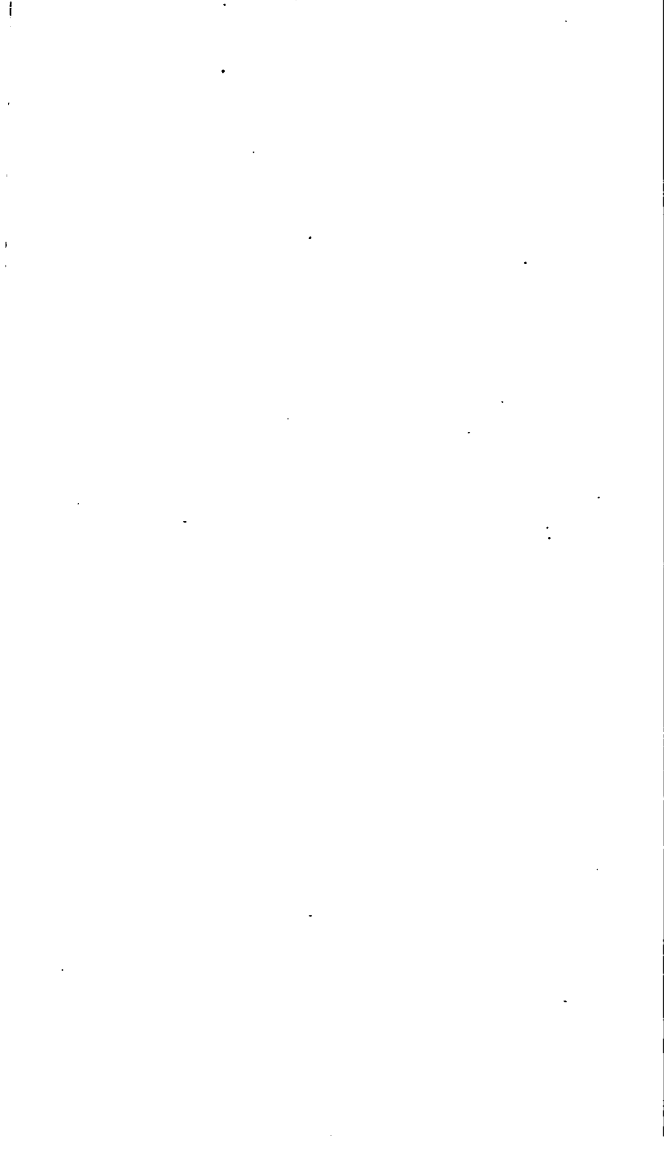












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